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SUBJECT: ARS AND VOA SPEAKERS EMPOWER 200 MORE JOURNALISTS IN DRC

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¶1. (U) Summary: Crisscrossing the Congo in April and June, ahead of historic elections July 30, VOA Chief Editor (Central Africa French service) Ferdinand Ferella, and ARS Speaker Eduardo Cue held seven workshops in five cities, for a total of 200 radio and television journalists. PAO accompanied them. Sixty other journalists participated in similar workshops in February, those too under the tutelage of Eduardo Cue. In their own way, both speakers sought to give Congolese journalists tips to ensure their credibility, give voice to the public, and bolster their courage to ask uncomfortable questions of those who seek to govern. The pre-election period is an ideal opportunity, they said, for journalists responsibly to exert their freedoms. If they failed, Cue contended, Congolese democracy, too, would fail. End Summary

Cue: Inconvenient Truths

¶2. (U) As in February, when he held forth at workshops organized by PD in Kinshasa (reftel), Eduardo Cue, the Paris-based correspondent for U.S. News and World Report (which recently featured an article by Cue on Zimbabwe), used theoretical, ethical and practical lessons and examples to make powerful points about the importance of press credibility in covering the July 30, and subsequent, elections. This time, PD took his presentation on the road, to Lubumbashi (June 15) and Kananga (June 17-18), finishing up with a workshop in Kinshasa (June 20).

¶3. (U) With the Society of Professional Journalists ethics code in hand, Eduardo Cue addressed corrupt practices in journalism, warning against conflicts of interest. This is a particularly hard message for underpaid Congolese journalists, who survive on payments from those seeking favorable press treatment (known here as "coupage"), and/or for journalists who moonlight as press attaches for government ministries or political parties.

¶4. (U) There was a stunned silence among the 38 participants in Kananga when Cue asserted that "coupage" and other ethical transgressions by reporters could actually destroy the DRC's nascent democracy and usher in renewed conflict. Cue reasoned that if the coming elections are perceived as lacking integrity, then political instability and worse could follow. Slanted, tendentious, and irresponsible reporting, deriving often from conflicts of interest, could simply rob the elections of their credibility, he concluded. Eduardo Cue had the same jaw-dropping reaction in Lubumbashi when he told the 35 reporters at the workshop that many were working hard for honest elections, but not journalists, yet their role was perhaps the most important in a successful transition to democracy.

¶5. The good news, Eduardo Cue said, is that journalists have more

power than they realize to make a stand for press freedom, a sine qua non of democracy, and this election period affords a prime opportunity. In Kananga and Kinshasa, Cue cited the example of a commercial radio station journalist in Lubumbashi, our first stop, who told the workshop that the second time the Congolese intelligence service (ANR) threatened her and seized her equipment, her station took the incident on the air. The ANR returned her equipment. While most such encounters will not have such felicitous outcomes, Cue said that this case proved that a stand could be made.

¶16. Armed with credibility and professionalism, the reporter must then assert his or her independence by, at times, going against accepted wisdom, said Cue. Reporters must have the courage to raise uncomfortable and inconvenient questions. Eduardo Cue lamented that the American media failed in this regard between 9/11 and the Iraq war. By not putting Western journalism on a pedestal, Eduardo Cue made his high standards more accessible to the Congolese journalists.

Lead, Angle, Close: Practical Advice

¶17. Using reports prepared in advance by the participants, both Eduardo Cue and Ferdinand Ferella plunged into the techniques of radio reporting. Ferella encouraged journalists in Kinshasa (April 22, 24), Kisangani (April 26), and Goma (April 28) - who eagerly crammed ideas and sound bites into their 90-second reports - to develop one central message, avoid beginning with background material, avoid adages and clichés, and (especially in radio) use economy of words. Cue exhorted each journalist to have a clear idea about what he or she wanted to know (Savoir ce qu'on veut savoir). Ferella and Cue both lectured on interview techniques. Both also

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stressed that, in radio reporting, the container has to be as important as the contents. That is, if lead, angle, sources, and close are not well done, the audience will not listen or not remember. In a very practical vein, Cue underscored the importance of putting partial election results in proper perspective, to avoid having a final counting reversal become a pretext for contesting the results.

¶18. Ferdinand Ferella held a special workshop with RAGA radio and television personnel, given the VOA's rebroadcast arrangement with RAGA. With Congolese press credentials, Ferella also prepared stories for VOA on "coupage" and on candidates recruiting children to stage rallies or other demonstrations. Ferella, who was the only international correspondent to report directly from Kisangani while war raged in the city during the late 90s, and whose daily VOA broadcasts are heard in the DRC, was given a certificate of appreciation by a civic organization when in Kisangani this time.

Comment

¶19. Given the stakes of the July 30 democratic elections in the DRC, this large country's first in more than 40 years, these workshops were perhaps the most important he had ever held, according to one of our speakers. To be sure, journalistic professionalism in the DRC will stay very uneven for a long time, "coupage" will continue to corrupt, and criminal defamation laws will continue to intimidate journalists. Still, when combined with similar efforts undertaken by other international donors (notably, DFID, France, Belgium, UNDP, EU), Congolese journalists increasingly know that they have the power to do more than parrot, or hand the microphone over to, political leaders, and the responsibility to inform the voter.

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